

Group Government

BY A. E. SMITH, M. L. A.

Western Canada has been the stage during recent months of a forced political revival, led by special political evangelists, who have laboriously set forth the sad condition into which the country has arrived, and what is the only hope, in their opinion, of any measure of salvation.

The preaching of these political saviours consisted mainly of two subjects, viz., the tariff and group development.

The latter subject filled them with profound sorrow and apprehension. It was to be regarded as a wholly evil thing, this group development and organization, and the faithful partizans were solemnly exhorted to eschew the evil thing and cling to the good old party forms and watchwords.

The forced revival has ended in a dismal disappointment for the special pleaders, and with the minimum of effectiveness upon the minds of the people it is true. The people do not understand the reasons for the peculiar situation, and but few of them are endeavoring to make an analysis of its elements.

The Provincial elections of June, 1920, witnessed the struggle to gain political entity of a number of movements

The outstanding feature of the campaign was the appearance of numerous candidates, representing a great variety of more or less well-defined issues. The Norris government, which had held office for nearly five years in a legislature of 48 members, of whom the Government controlled 42, approached the campaign with what proved to be a great degree of over-confidence. There were Conservative candidates and candidates of the Labor party; there were Farmer candidates and Independent candidates; there were candidates of the Socialist party and of the Social Democratic party.

Out of that election came the present house of legislature. It is composed of 55 members and the Lieutenant-Governor. It is provincial in character and power, but within its domain it is indisputably the highest authority there is.

The opening of the first session of the present Legislature, which is known as the Sixteenth Legislature, brought together the most unique body of government that has been convened in modern times. The Liberal party had been reduced in numbers from 42, in the fifteenth legislature, to 20 members. In this small number were included seven who constituted the Executive Council, which is simply the executive committee of the legislature, and more characteristically is it an Executive Committee in the present house than in any former house. This

group of men who compose the executive council draw their dominancy from the 15th legislature rather than from the 16th, which creates an anomalous situation; since, with only four elevenths of the members as followers, as compared with the great majority in the former house, they continue to exercise the functions of government and prate about the validity of the constitution.

The second largest group in the house is the Farmers, numbering 16 members, and on the side there are two independent farmers. The Labor party numbers 10 members, and the Conservatives have seven. From this it will be clearly apparent that no one group, in itself, can find sufficient grounds on which to establish a claim to retain and exercise the sole control of the administration of public affairs.

This group formation is wholly a result of the spontaneous life of the province. It expresses the will of the people as given at the polls in the last election, where ample opportunity was afforded for careful canvassing of the situation, and the development of sound judgment upon the issues and candidates presenting themselves.

The present group alignment is evidence of a healthy condition of public opinion. It indicates alertness and discrimination, and should be encouraged by every citizen who desires advancement to be achieved in the matters which concern the

common people. An outcry is being raised against this group alignment by the old party papers, and the old partizans who regard society as fixed, and the grit and tory parties as heaven-born divisions of the human race since the beginning of time.

This group alignment is an indication that many people are breaking away from political bigotry and bondage, put upon them by grit and tory, and are breathing a freer air of larger intellectual and social outlook.

The group alignment should be followed by the establishment of a group government. This idea was framed into a resolution, found on last page of this pamphlet, during the past session, by the member for Brandon and, after a lengthy debate, on a division of the house, was defeated by the speaker. The meaning of this is plain to anyone who understands and can exercise a little reflection upon the situation which now confronts society.

The close vote indicates the growing power and boldness of the peoples' cause, as against the privileges enjoyed by the ruling classes. It is inimicable to the designs and position of the ruling classes, the holders of special privilege, that any such proposal as a group government should obtain dominating support. Those who talk about their concern for the people, and yet vote against such a proposal, in the face of the present intolerable social

conditions, are simply practising deception. For the workers, and all who have sympathy with radical doctrines, involving the welfare of the common people, the matter is of the utmost concern and importance. It indicates not only a negative agent, so far as the grit and tory parties are concerned, but it also embodies a positive agent, so far as the evolution of the power and education of the proletarian movement in Canada and America is concerned.

The political development of the future may, at any moment, open upon an occasion, maybe for the moment trivial, but none the less fraught with large consequences, which will give the point of departure at which the element of the industrial can be, and should be, associated with the political in the constituted administration of public affairs.

Given a group government already functioning upon the political plane, there would be only a minimum of adjustments to be made in order to achieve the combination and complete coordination and cooperation between the political and industrial authorities and organizations. The indications of the present are by no means barren of meaningful signs that some such adjustments will be found to be the way out of the dead-locks which are now arresting progress in the settlement of the many vexing questions,

The foregoing is intended to sug-

gest and stimulate thought in regard to this matter. There is a side to the question which should make a very forceful appeal to every worker, to every member of any organization that is desirous of promoting intelligent action and loyal support, on behalf of the labor party and kindred organizations.

Consider what would have been the difference in events if there had been a group government in Manitoba at the time of the strike in 1919. What would have been the difference if such a government had been in power at that time in the Dominion?

There would have been no such prejudicial results as obtained, so far as the labor unions and their spokesmen were concerned; and that is saying a good deal. The workers should remember that the contest is not over and the cause of the people is not yet triumphant. Every means is being employed by the overhead system to crush that cause, to deceive its weaker and less resolute members, to direct attention of the self-interested by hush-money, to crush the determined and well-informed by poverty and prison. There is need for intelligence and determination and patient union of all agencies in the carrying on of the contest. Every means that can legitimately be devised, no matter how momentary, should be employed to weaken and disintegrate the opposing powerful system.

This idea of group government is one such temporary agent to be employed in advancing the cause of the people, Long live the people.

The Resolution

Mr. Smith moved, seconded by Mr. Bayley.

That whereas, the present representation in this Legislation is a result of a recent expression of the will of the people of this Province;

"And whereas, the present representation in this Legislature is a result of a recent expression of the will of the people of this Province;

"And whereas the present representation furnishes evidence of new political alignments in public opinion which have resulted in the election of the various groups now occupying their respective places in this Legislature;

"And whereas, the present representation in this Legislature, being, as it is, the most recent expression of the will of the people of this Province as given at the polls, does not furnish a sufficiently sound basis upon which any one of the several groups should assume the sole control of the administration of public affairs in this Province;

Now therefore be it resolved, That in the opinion of this Legislature the time has arrived when the Executive Council for the administration of the affairs of this Province should be selected from and by the

present representation in this Legislature;

" And further be it resolved, That in the event of the foregoing principle being endorsed by the Legislature, that action should be taken thereupon without any further delay."

And a debate thereon arising, and the main question being put, the House divided, and the names being called for, they were taken down as follows:

Yea.—Messieurs Bayley, Bernier, Dixon, Duprey, Fjeldsted, Haig, Hamelin, Hryhorczuk, Ivens, Kennedy, Kristjansson, Little, Moore, Palmer, Ridley, Robson, Smith, Spinks, Stanbridge, Talbot, Tanner, Taylor, Tupper, Waugh, Yakimischak—25.

Nay.—Messieurs Armstrong (Gladstone), August, Boivin, Brown, Cameron, Clingan, Emmond, Findlater, Fletcher, Johnson, Kirvan, McConnell, McDonald, McKinnell, McPherson, Mabb, Malcolm, Morrison, Norris, Richardson, Rogers (Mrs.), Stovel, Thornton, Williams, Wilson—25.

The Speaker gave the casting vote—Nay.

So it passed in the negative.
